1:Sanders Z-5/4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

horsefly, he will put it in his wallet for good luck. Or if he is returning from the field and sees two crows quarreling while flying high over a house, he will be reminded of the belief that either the husband or the wife in that house will die soon. If he sees a crow pass in front of him from right to left, he will consider it a good omen; but if from left to right, he will expect bad luck. Should a rabbit or snake be in the path ahead, the peasant knows he must walk on in a straight line; should the road turn to the right or left, then the individual had better return home and start the journey the following day.

A spider walking on you will bring good luck, but if you come upon two snakes fighting and eating each other, a close relation of yours will die. Should you be a shepherd in the Vardousia Mountains of Central Greece, you would probably believe that the wild goats which graze in herds are guarded by the devil and that is why one can hear them make a whistling noise. Furthermore, these wild goats have the same notches cut in their ears as the tame ones kept by the shepherds, which to these mountaineers is proof positive that the devil must be the one who puts the markings there.

Seeing some insect or animal may bring to mind a story learned when a child. The bee, for instance, was once as white as cotton. When Adam and Eve met the devil in the Garden of Eden, it was the bee that saw them first and flew immediately to tell God the news. The devil, who was then holding a burning torch in his hand, ran and tried to catch the bee to keep her from her mission. He could not reach her, but as she was nearing God the devil from afar threw the flaming torch at her. The fire singed her so that she became black. God, who saw all of this, ordered the human beings to burn in the churches only the candles made from beeswax since the bee had proven to be the purest creature of all. I am often asked if these folk beliefs (cited here and in later sections of this book) are widely held or are only the relic in the mind of some aged person. It is safe to say that almost all of them are very much alive at the conversational level. People are aware of them, talk about them. Obviously, many act on them, while others do not. But they are a part of the general atmosphere, as is the belief common in America that a person should not walk under a ladder.

Such beliefs, stories, and personal experiences with many kinds of plants and animals reinforce the rural Greek's sense of intimacy with nature, which develops because of his constant exposure to the elements in the course of his daily life. The Greek peasant, like many farmers elsewhere, moves through a living landscape with which he communicates.

The same holds true for his view of the cosmos and the movement of the heavenly bodies.[1] One of the simplest and clearest descriptions of the latter is taken from an account of a village prepared by a singing master in

1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

821 [127] one of the high schools in Athens. T. K. Papaspyropoulos has written of his native settlement near Kalavryta in the Peloponnesos.[a] A literal translation has been used in order to retain some of the flavor of the village informants.

The sky. Our mother told us that the sky was a big dome which covers the earth like a lid of a cauldron. This dome has for ornaments the sun, the moon, and the stars. High up in this dome God has his throne and sits with Christ, the [772] Virgin, with all the saints and the angels. Near the throne of God is Paradise with the souls of the good people and the saints. Hell is down below in the deepest part of the earth, together with the devils and the sinners. May God protect us!

The sun. The sun is the god of the day. He throws light on the earth and warms the people. The sun brings cereals and all the goods which are upon the earth. Without him we would be dead from cold. The sun does not only warm us but tours the whole world and brings greetings to all those who are away from their home. He also tells us what he sees. We have many songs for the [533] sun, such as those which begin "My sun, three times my sun, and my world-roamer." "The working people watch for him."

[271] Everybody is afraid of the sun. We do not drink water while facing him, neither do we look straight into him because we get blind. In summer time the sun either burns our cereals or our heads. But in winter we beg him to come out and warm us up. We sit there by the sunny spot and he bakes our bodies. We [533] also sing him a song: "Come on out, my sun. Just come out a little bit so that we can take a walk near the threshing floor." Sometimes it rains heavily and the sun is out at the same time. Then we sing to him: "Sun, sun and rain, when the poor get married. Sun, sun and moon, when the donkeys get married. Sun, sun and drizzle, when the female teacher gets married."

The moon. Just as the day has for a king the sun, the night has the moon as its king. The moon is a more agile king than the sun. It takes a walk on the sky shining and chasing the clouds and makes people come out of their homes. [512] With the moon the women spin at night; the children play on the threshing floors; the men water their fields; the muleteers can see and go to their work; and the shepherds enjoy the slopes together with their sheep while playing the flute. But the moon can also harm. The biggest harm is done to the thieves because it throws its light and does not allow them to rob for they can be seen. "The thief enjoys darkness and the wolf the upheaval" [distracting disturbance]. When the moon comes out for the first time we say: "Welcome to the new moon. We are happy to see you. Bring us good." Many seek to find money. They get hold of it and say: "As the moon gets full may my purse get full of coins." When the moon disappears those who are in the mountain and see it set say: "May you fare well and return better and achieve better things." "My moon, my shining moon, and beautifully adorned, did you by any chance see Andrew and his ship?" . . .

[539] *The milky way* (the priest's straw). Do you see those stars that divide the sky into two? We call them the priest's straw. Once upon a time a priest went to stay for a couple of days in a monastery. When he left, because he couldn't

1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

take anything else with him, he took off his cloak and filled it with straw. As he hurried away in his rush and fright the straw bit by bit fell on the road and became stars. When he got to his house his robe was empty and behind him followed the monks. Since then we call these stars the priest's straw.

Rain. When summer has come to an end and fall is there we pick our grapes and harvest our maize and are waiting for God to send rain so that we can sow our wheat. The first rains start in mid-October. . . . They start either with a slow modest rain or sometimes with a strong one. The strong rain starts abruptly and all hell lets loose. The sky meets with the earth. Lightning, thunder, wind, hell. We all run with our hoes to hold the water back from entering our homes; others run to pull their animals out of ravines so that the water does not carry them away. Others gather the things that have remained outside, and others shelter themselves in their homes and gaze at the storm from their windows. When the weather turns good again it is the joy of God. Then we get ready our agricultural equipment for the field; it is time to sow. Rain is our life. Without it nothing grows; we are lost. But the rain can also do harm. When it rains suddenly the rivers come down with a rush carrying things and destroying our fields. It carries many rocks and stones onto the plain; when it rains and blows, it's hell. It throws down the wheat and it does a lot of damage. A good rain is a slow one. . . .

But nature is more than a collection of stars or plants or animals. It represents the forces against which man must contend as he seeks to wrest his living from the soil; nature brings disasters to which man must adjust even though he does not completely reconcile himself to his misfortune.

One type of catastrophe that visits Greece at frequent intervals is the earthquake, which comes usually in the late spring and summer. Wherever a person travels in Central Greece, Thessaly, or the Peloponnesos, he hears of the damage done by tremors. There is today an Old Corinth and a New Corinth, the latter being built after the old city was destroyed in 1858. New Corinth was once more destroyed in 1928 and rebuilt. In one village people still talk with sadness of a quake which occurred in 1875, killing forty-seven women and children inside the church. One of the most damaging earthquakes of recent memory was the August 1953 series of tremors in the Ionian Islands which destroyed so much of Cephalonia, Zante, and Ithaca. In April and May of 1954, more than thirty persons were killed in the quakes of Thessaly, three hundred injured, and thirty-two thousand made homeless.

Nature shows its unkindness in other ways. Sudden hailstorms, drought, and insect pests take their annual toll in many parts of Greece. While on a trip with the inspector of agriculture from Larissa, Thessaly, through some fields recently damaged by a storm, I asked him what the peasants thought of such a devastating rain. He said that they did not feel any enmity against the elements but do say in all seriousness to them "na se pare ho diavolos!" (may the devil take you!)

1:Sanders Z-5,4 (1952-1959) 1962 EH1 Greece EH1

whom they will marry. This is done by associating the verse being sung with the girl whose forfeit is drawn from the pitcher or jar at that particular time.

To call attention, however, to the major holy days is to overlook the importance of the minor holy days in regulating much of the life of the older villager who is still apt to be tradition-bound. For example, on July 2, the Day of the Virgin the Sheafbearer, many peasants will not harvest for fear that any sheaves they would gather would be destroyed by fire; or on July 7, the Day of St. Kyriaki, peasant women in many parts of Greece will not bake bread for fear that it will be eaten by snakes; or on July 17, the Day of St. Marina, the people go to the vineyards to collect grapes. On this same day they may make a public sacrifice of a calf, letting the animal's blood run in a special ditch; they follow this sacrifice with a common meal. On July 20, the Day of the Prophet Elijah (Elias), there are also festivals and sacrifices, chiefly because so many churches are named in his honor. Some people go to worship on the mountaintops; others try to foretell the weather since Elijah is associated with rain and thunder; and still others light fires on the mountainsides or in the villages.

Thus one could run through each month. There are dates when livestock owners can begin to let their animals pasture freely in fields and vineyards (September 14), when master and servants are supposed to draw up the contract between them (October 26), when the wine cask is to be opened (November 3 or 11), when agricultural work is to be finished for the year (November 14), when the fountain is to be fed with seeds (November 21), when the icons are to be dipped into the sea (December 6).[8] Each of these dates in and of itself is perhaps not very significant, for the taboos and customs are of a relatively simple sort; but they do illustrate the rich heritage of folklore which surrounds every village, day in and day out, and which adds to the color and vividness of rural life in Greece.

These saints' days also afford the basis for the custom of observing namedays. In Greece, a person and his family pay little attention to his birthday but make much of the day of the saint whose name he bears. In Amphypolis, for instance, on a boy's nameday his parents will sacrifice a lamb. They will sing and dance and afterwards feast on the lamb because, as one village girl expressed it, "each boy belongs to a certain saint and the lamb is for the saint." Throughout Greece one visits a friend on his nameday, enjoys the good food that is served, and wishes the individual long life and happiness. In a village where there are many people named Constantine or George, people go from one party to another until they have had more than enough food and drink.

The greatest holidays of the year are Christmas and Easter, with the latter being the more important. As a matter of fact, Christmas is only one part of the so-called Twelve Days (*Dodekaemeron*) between Christmas

2: Friedl E-5 (1955-1959) EH1 Greece EH1
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hered to. Vasilika is a settlement in which there is some grumbling about, and some disregard of, the formal requirements of the Church as an institution; but God Himself, *"O papus apano,"* "the grandfather above," as He is sometimes affectionately called, is felt to be close, real, and not wholly inscrutable. He is an omnipresent force in the lives of men. Such phrases as *"Echi o theos,"* "God has (the wherewithal to provide)," fall easily from the villagers' lips as does the attribution to God, rather than to nature as an abstraction, of common physical phenomena: *"Vrechi o theos,"* "God is raining." The magical and spiritual protection which is available for children, then, continues to be available to adults but is considered less necessary and takes on a more formal religious guise.

Adult-Child Relationships

Let us return now to some of the strains that children are under. There are, of course, the ordinary physical hazards of life in a village like Vasilika. Children are kept from getting too close to the fires, to the oven, to other peoples' dogs; they are protected from the harsh effects of the weather. In addition, however, there are the hazards created by the behavior of other human beings. A woman suckling her infant, for example, may let the baby almost start to suck, then pull herself away, then let the child start again, then pull herself away. She may repeat these actions three or four times, talking and laughing as she does so, finally permiting the baby to suckle contentedly only after it has exhibited some discomfort by whimpering or squirming within its swaddling bands.

Such action is the beginning of a long series of similar teasing incidents in early childhood, sometimes connected with food, sometimes with other matters. A father of a two-year-old boy may call him over to have some of the sweet preserve that is being served to guests. The child runs eagerly to his father's knee. The father touches the spoonful of sweet to the child's mouth and as the boy opens his mouth to take the food, the father snatches the spoon away. He may repeat this several times until the child starts to cry. Then he lets the child eat, and hugs and pats him telling him he is a good boy.

In a different kind of situation, several boys of eighteen or nineteen encouraged the three-year-old brother of one of them to start a physical fight with his equally small cousin. The older boys shouted encouragement and made them intensify the pummelling of each other to the point where the children were knocking each other down and bruising themselves on the stones and rough earth of the yard. The little boys started to cry; the older boys laughed and then, still laughing, took the children into their arms and hugged and kissed them, calling them by endearing names. On one occasion, when a government agricultural extension agent was in the village injecting chickens against Newcastle's disease, a father lifted his little two-year-old son into the air, turned him upside down with the child's back facing the agent, and laughingly told